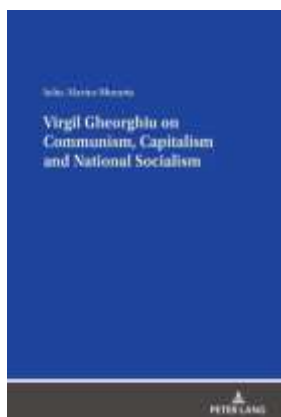


Iuliu-Marius Morariu, *Virgil Gheorghiu on Communism, Capitalism and National Socialism*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2022, 260 p.:

Memorial literature (memories, diaries, autobiographies, correspondence) have been highly-valued and continue to enjoy a great deal of attentiveness, both from historians and sociologists of memory. Undoubtedly, memoirs serve as a valuable source for learning in detail about the chief-patterns of past societies and the social life subjected to cyclic changes. Certain events and painful twists such as: turbulent episodes in the history of 20th century Romania and Europe, upheavals and major earthquakes caused by political movements (ideologies) in a disorderly evolution, the schizophrenia imposed by half a century of rupture between individuals within the country and the writers in exile (beyond the Iron Curtain)-forced some disciplines to unite in order to understand in detail the social and political arrangements of those times. Thus, history was gradually pushed to show openness and adopt a next-door neighbor approach with some fields such as: sociology, political science and, ultimately, with literature, more precisely with the literature of memories. These topics are eye-catching to ***Iuliu-Marius Morariu***-a worthy researcher holding a PhD in Theology from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania and (a second one) in Social Sciences from Angelicum Pontifical University, Rome, Italy (by the means of this book).



Iuliu-Marius Morariu-succeeds in opening the door of our curious gaze on memorialism, letting us get acquainted with the ideas promoted by Virgil Gheorghiu-an interwar diplomat, journalist, poet, novelist and Romanian Orthodox priest, who had to choose the path of exile (moving to France) once with the establishment of the Communist Regime in Romania. An „out of print” figure for some and a model for others, Father Virgil Gheorghiu, a world-class personality with an impressive work translated into 34 languages remains an important pillar within Romanian culture and literature. The volume proposed by Iuliu-Marius Morariu is structured in five chapters. Overall, the author aims to share with the readers a holistic approach-by engaging in an intellectual exercise to dig-down deep within the particularities of Virgil Gheorghiu’s

thinking, managing „to present his reflections on three important ideologies, namely, *Communism, National Socialism and Capitalism*” (p. 8). This research brings to light the tumultuous destiny of the author alongside with his virulent reproaches against the violent primitivism of the East and the insidious promises of capitalist paradise. Iuliu-Marius Morariu-focuses upon a detailed analysis of primary and secondary sources, employing a solid methodological plan as a way to comprehend how the ideas of Gheorghiu were born and received. The first sources of documentation gravitate around: **1.** Gheorghiu’s books and **2.** as secondary sources: the correspondence with important figures (Mircea Eliade), biographies dedicated to Father Gheorghiu (Cubleșan, Gillyboeuf), references that can be found in some of the notorious exile voices in France (Neagu Djuvara, Virgil Ierunca, Monica Lovinescu), archives of the Romanian Securitate, notes found in his exile works and Romanian translations of Gheorghiu’s books). Not overlooking the double value-documentary and literary, Iuliu-Marius Morariu suggests that memorialistic prose in all its forms, but especially memories and memoirs, is a reading as instructive as it is enjoyable and delightful, which is based more on the artistic mastery of the writer in evoking countless events that would be lost if not immortalized. As highlighted by Iuliu-Marius Morariu, memorialistic treasury oscillates between the objective and subjective stances. In this particular case, Gheorghiu did not push himself away from using passages containing metaphors or allusions (*Chiralesa*) or adopting different stances longing to relate images of reality and truth as a way to issue a warning upon the atrocities and mass violence encouraged by ideologies. Wherefore, the reader may also notice slightly differences in the building-process of certain memories of war, depending on the context: „when Gheorghiu took part in the campaign for the release of Bessarabia, the fights in Crimea or the one with the submarine to Sevastopol and the unfinished novel published posthumously that also contains well-documented critics of *Communism*” (p. 10). Being mindful of all this, the young researcher adopts a critical outlook and an in-depth analysis of the documents - not forgetting to underline the importance of a perspective coming from the Romanian side, addition to the consistency and up-to-date ideas of Gheorghiu and possible concepts shaped after getting in touch with certain authors and different periods which helped him accurately interpret the meaning of the cultural, social, philosophical, and political movements prevalent within Romanian society at the time of the writing. *In extenso*, the volume tackles the topic of moral and spiritual downgrading caused by wicked ideologies as reflected in Constantin-

Virgil Gheorghiu's writings: *The 25th Hour*, *The Leather Cloth* or *The Sacrifice of the Danube*.

In the first chapter, Iuliu-Marius Morariu did not limit himself to a classical exposure of Gheorghiu's biography, but extended the area of research, embodying the personality, actions, writings of the controversial author in the political realities of the time. In an age of narrowing specializations, Virgil Gheorghiu illustrated the Social Sciences and Humanities breadth, studying both Letters and Theology (philosophical sympathies and psychological affinities could also be grasped in his works). The brilliance of his literary talent had been noticed since his studentship, having the extraordinary chance to publish in prestigious magazines: „Parrot Tickets”, „Literary Life”, „World” (p. 18)-rejoicing the support of Nicolae Crevedia and Tudor Arghezi. In 1940, his stubbornness to devote himself entirely to literary creation-was endowed to the fullest by winning the Royal Foundation's Poetry Prize with the volume *Calligraphy on the Snow*. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Virgil Gheorghiu had fulfilled his journalistic duties as a press correspondent on the Bessarabian front, successfully managing to cover and publish a consistent number of detailed war reports. When Soviets managed to seize power, they openly pointed him out as a threat to the regime. Under these unfortunate circumstances, by 1943, he and his wife rode to Zagreb, Croatia, where he was delegated as a press attaché of the Romanian embassy. After the Red Army occupied Romania in the fall of 1944, the Soviets had enough months to impose the Communist Regime. Therefore, the possibility of returning to his country was completely out of the question. Moving to Croatia, he did not find a favorable ground to fulfill his intellectual vocation, further to the imprisonment in a camp based in Vienna on the grounds of being „a diplomat from an enemy country”. It seemed that Virgil Gheorghiu has stepped in an absurd maze if we take into account the fact that upon his arrival in Thuringia, he was labeled as „Germanophile” by the Allied Control Council and thrown for two years (1945-1947) in the prison camps from Darmstadt and Nuremberg. Released in 1947, he re-encountered his wife, both settling in Heidelberg. There, Virgil Gheorghiu enrolled in the Faculty of Theology and began writing the novel: *The 25th Hour*-an allegory pointing how ideological dystopias work together to dehumanize a world that was once on the heights of civilization. All in all, his life-unfolds among doctrinal condemnations, deprived of the possibility to defend himself. In this context, Morariu reminds us that human resistance has been Gheorghiu's lifelike ideology

sprung from a Christian root along with the much acclaimed and often misunderstood true meaning of *resistance through culture*.

In the subsequent chapter of the book, „The Reflections of Virgil Gheorghiu on Communism”, the author brings us into view some observations and negative remarks pointed out by Gheorghiu towards the aforementioned ideology, a political regime that manifested itself strongly after the Second World War in Romania. Within this chapter, he proposes a two-part analysis of Communism: first, as reflected in the early writing of Virgil-Gheorghiu (before 1944 based on his experience on the battlefield) and, secondly, the one primarily enclosed after 23rd August 1944 (p. 85). Long-range, the works of Virgil-Gheorghiu on Communism highlight practices applied by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, a Communist political figure strictly following the Moscow line of imposing the communist regime in Romania. Also, Virgil Gheorghiu does not tend to undervalue the political stance nurtured by Nicolae Ceaușescu who adjoined the Communist Regime with an obvious nationalist blow and a relative openness towards the West after Dej’s death. Partially exploring an emotional tone and nostalgia, works such as: *The 25th Hour* and *The Second Chance*-revolve around topics such as: the atrocities committed by the Soviet Army and aparatski, the Gulag-a system of Soviet labor camps and accompanying detention and transit camps and prisons, the outlawing of the Opposition, the destruction of the villages through industrialization, the process of collectivization-a form of Stalinist „modernization” of rural areas (p. 103). To a large extent, the works of Virgil Gheorghiu bring to light the exile experience. *In nuce*, exile reveals itself as a traumatic hideout, but also a close-call solution, through which people in the Communist system safeguard and defend their freedom and life by departing from their country of origin. Iuliu-Marius Morariu successfully points out that in the case of Father Gheorghiu the exile should be understood both as a restorative creative process together with an extreme break out from the reach of various forms of dictatorship.

It is significant and noteworthy that Virgil Gheorghiu underlines the meltdown of mental, spiritual, and behavioral structures of the interwar period, foresawing the decline on all fronts-economic, human, and aesthetic-rapidly and highly visible not far from 1944. At a turning point in history, when the process of industrialization had already started to substitute the hallmarks of society and when monarchies were abolished in a row, a Faustian bargain was placed in front of humankind: an express rejection of traditions and morals. Ultimately, this would give

birth to a greater brand-new era as promised by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as indicated in the „Communist Manifesto” (1848). In short, „dialectical materialism”-a strand of Marxism aims to synthesize Hegel’s dialectics, which highlights that each economic order reaches a state of maximum effectiveness, while simultaneously expanding internal disallowances and weaknesses that contribute to its systemic peril. The adherents who spread the ideas of Communism foster the belief that any evolution is made through struggle and that life is nothing more than matter. Within this context, it’s easy-to-understand the disregard for human life embodied by all Communist leaders which sought to eliminate, by legal and physical means, any annoyances or defiances to their despotic power. Also, public executions and harassment became instruments applied to diverse social groups-the nobility, the middle-class, the intellectuals and the clergy. By applying this strategy, Communists managed to impose their credo: the knock-down of one eternal truth: religion (p. 95). The young researcher gave this chapter a coherent structure, fully encompassing the vivid and manifold spirit of Virgil Gheorghiu which can be read in several registers: of the journalist, of the novelist, of the poet, of the sage. Thus, within this malignant political realm, Virgil Gheorghiu had to internalize the exile as a given but also regarding it as a literal opportunity by means of which he could offer a new insight to the traumatic experiences faced by the residents of Eastern Europe countries. Overall, Virgil Gheorghiu assumes that in an age in which Communists and Germans set out a new global order, the spiritual realm was fulfilling its life buoy role. Without traces of doubt, Father Gheorghiu fully embraced the Orthodox spiritual identity approaching God with an open eye. Clearly, the war element determined Gheorghiu to be skeptical of the evanescent „outside world” and to pursue the truth which stands as a ground of the „inside world”, the world of essences, constants, permanences.

An extensive analysis on National Socialism can be glimpsed within the third chapter of the book. Significantly, and somehow not surprisingly, Iuliu-Marius Morariu argues that Virgil Gheorghiu was not ideologically committed to this attitude, but his caution in relation to this abhorant tenet was due to two circumstances. First, the marriage with the lawyer Ecaterina Burbea (a Jewish Lady)-relationship which ended-up causing him problems during the royal dictatorship of King Carol II with the legionary government. Secondly, Virgil Gheorghiu pretended to be „*a man of the system*”-being pushed by the idea of not losing track of the prizes and distinctions received as a result of his prodigious literary

activity. Iuliu-Marius Morariu considered it necessary to carefully break down the ideas and remarks of Virgil Gheorghiu in two parts: first, his conception of National Socialism before 23rd of August 1944 whereas the second part focuses sooner on the period before the above mentioned time-frame. Father Virgil Gheorghiu explored the archaeology of Nazism within his work: *The Sacrifice of the Danube, Condotiera, Chiralesa* (p. 12), but also through several reportages from the battlefield. By this means, Virgil Gheorghiu—a prominent figure of the XXth century—proved not only his journalistic flair, but also his understanding of National Socialism in its full complexity, as the embodiment of an utopian demonism. Within this wide stream, one term persistently stands out: power. Quickly, it soon became evident that the ideology proposed by Hitler, as well as that of the Soviet Union and Mussolini's Italy, was not just a question of power, it was power itself. Virgil Gheorghiu ascertains that the feature which stood out strongest and that had the most consistency was—in fact—the clotting of a racial community, by exterminating those considered poisonous, in essence, Jews (p. 145). Beyond 1930, once with the rise of Social Nationalism, Virgil Gheorghiu sought to bring to attention the typical scenario of a totalitarian landscape pointing out in his work references to: the set-up of concentration camps (comparable in many ways to the Gulag), the systematic planning of resentment spread by NSDAP (German National Socialist Workers' Party)—and the insertion of a mythological system, one that enshrined the hegemony of salvationist political myths. Iuliu-Marius Morariu highlights that the seeds of National Socialism were to be found in what made the charismatic legitimacy of the leaders possible, since these leaders acted in the manner of demiurges proscribing sets of rules in their societies. By this, National Socialism ended-up getting dressed as a secular religion (as in the case of Bolshevism). Alongside a war declared against critical spirit, both National Socialism and Communism did not solely wipe-off liberalism, but the entire heritage of European humanism-conservative beliefs and the administration of justice (p. 159).

The rich and insightful last two chapters of the volume focus merely upon the dimensions of an overgoing crisis typical to modern societies (deeply rooted within the ideology of consumption). Father Virgil Gheorghiu makes no bone about the possibility to criticize the mischievous peculiarities of Capitalism—a free market economy system dominant in the Western world since the collapse of feudalism, in which production assets are privately owned and income allocated largely through the operations of global markets (p. 185). Throughout the book,

Iuliu-Marius Morariu indicates in no small measure the comparative standpoint deployed by Father Virgil Gheorghiu. Accordingly, Consumerism, together with Communism and National-Socialism are set-out as illusory-belief systems launched within the real or practical knowledge. For Father Virgil Gheorghiu, Nazism, Bourgeois ideology and Consumerism (partly) are movements which are trying to overthrow civilization and return it to tribalism. Adopting a criticizing stance, Virgil Gheorghiu undertakes his basic conviction upon global Capitalism - raising the concerns about the homogenization of ideologies and cultures according to the logic of consumption. This would cause what Gheorghiu names the process of colonization of the Old Continent on the basis of an American credo. The questionable nature of Consumerism and materialistic illusions are rightly pointed out in *The Great Exterminator* and *The Spy* (p. 12). From beyond the tempting golden wall of Consumerism-Virgil Gheorghiu submits to attention in a visionary manner the challenges of today's societies: artificial identities as the man becomes a consuming machine due to technology, superficial human relationships, an existence based on luxury, the loss of certain human qualities (empathy, sincerity), a deprivation from normal affective reactions. Briefly, Consumerism is associated with a defensive strategy designed for and useful to avoid real life (p. 203). If Communism and Social-Nationalism failed to create a homogeneous community, Consumerism also did not seem a victorious alternative to remove the world from the moral and spiritual swamp in which it got stuck.

Overall, Iuliu-Marius Morariu has shown how the pursuit of power functions as a core concept for three ideologies-Communism, Consumerism and National Socialism. Surely, Father Virgil Gheorghiu was a seminal figure in approaching discussions and the impact of totalitarian regimes (in the German space, Soviet Union and its satellite states-such as the case of Romania). As Iuliu-Marius Morariu points out, Virgil Gheorghiu played a significant role recognizing the parallels between Bolshevism and Nazism, while also helping underline the terminology that attempted to capture the nature of Consumerism. At the same time, the volume focuses upon the particularities of Virgil Gheorghiu's deeply personal experience due to differences which may appear in terms of the intensity of feelings during the state of being barred from one's native country. Through the 20th century, exile became synonymous with the term destiny. Thus, one finds that the exile does not actually presume the idea of an entirely new existence under up-to-date conditions. On the contrary, as Iuliu-Marius Morariu points out,

exile is, in truth, the swaying between two worlds (the world from which the exile arrives accompanied by their family history, the memory of the native place, which stand as essential roots for their narrative substance, and the world in which they settle, which has the role of embracing these confessions with extreme responsiveness).

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